

AN INDIAN COUNTRY FARM POLICY ROUNDTABLE

Hosted By Indian Nations Conservation Alliance & Intertribal Agriculture Council
Las Vegas, Nevada Friday, December 9, 2005

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MR. DUCHENEAUX: Good morning. My name is Zack Ducheneaux. I'm from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and I sit on IAC's Board of Directors. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard to the gentleman, and I'll try to be brief. The USDA currently has several programs that encourage value added agriculture. They even fund some of those efforts. Throughout Indian Country there is one type of value added agriculture that is ignored. Many of the Indians on the Western United States use the only resource we have left, to raise horses. We raise horses for breeding, for buck and stock. Some of us even ride them for a living. But they are ignored in the disaster programs and the other USDA program.

The USDA currently fails to recognize horses with the exception of a number of horses determined by a USDA employee or employees that is needed to run a ranch. Whether they've ever used a horse on a ranch or not, they're making that determination. So the rest of our horses are left out of the programs. To sum that up, the limits on the number of horses eligible for disaster assistance in other USDA programs should be removed and all of the horses raised on trust land in Indian Country should be allowed to participate or should be counted for the purpose of disaster programs. I would like to add one thing to what the gentleman said about limited resources. The definition to limited resource producer should be amended at the end and it should say, "shall also be any tribal member operating on trust land." That way we would all qualify based on the historical and documentable neglect of the USDA on Indian reservations.

MR. Racine can write all the papers you need on that. We have got it documented. We need to try to find a way to build accountability for FSA employees that don't do their job. As recently as this year, an individual was denied an application when they went into the county office for funding, any kind of application. They said, "Do we have to get the CED to interview you first." Now, had this not been one of the leading farm advocates in the nation, she wouldn't have got the application. Had it been one of our Indian elders who finally got the nerve up to go in to this office and do what is their right and apply for these services, they would have walked back out the door and never came in it again. That needs to be addressed, and that leads to my next comment.

I think we think to examine the issues, the underlying issues, in the Pigford and the Keepseagle cases and try to make some procedural changes and accountability changes in the FSA and the USDA because we are going to end up with another settlement that doesn't do it. Pigford didn't have any structural reforms, and it's a very costly treatment for a disease that should be cured to start with. The last thing that I have to offer is that Indians in Indian Country know best how to deal with what we have. So what I would like to see is research done or perhaps a pilot program on allowing tribes the ability to operate USDA programs under self-determination contracts so we are out there making the decisions on Indian ground. We can base it on the amount of -- you know, take the funding, take the amount of Indian land in that county, give that tribe that money to run the program. Because I guarantee you, 90 percent of the time, they'll do a better job, and they'll never do a worse job than what is being done now. That's all I have to offer. Thanks again for your time, and I appreciate the opportunity.

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MR. PARKER: Before you sit down, if you come see me, I'll give the telephone number of the person to call within FSA because if there is that injustice that is going on right now, then we want to use this opportunity to make sure that we address that. So I'll give you the individual's name. If you just come up right now, I'll just write it down.

MR. DUCHENEAUX: Thank you.

MR. PARKER: Just them that Vernon Parker told you to call them. Okay.

MR. RACINE: Next. You're supposed to come this way, not go out the back door. Please. Katherine.